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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a review of the current English language teaching situation in Egypt. The role of English in schools, in universities, as a medium of communication among the general public, and as a language of international communication is reviewed. English within the educational system is specifically considered, in terms of when it is introduced, the exposure in terms of hours, the materials used, the curriculum followed, the diplomas or certificates offered, and the evaluation methods. The administration of English programs, and special courses in English for special purposes and commercial English are discussed, as well as the teaching cadre and the instructional materials. The teaching staff is discussed in terms of qualifications, training, and evaluation. English outside the educational system is discussed in terms of the availability of classes and the demand for them, and in terms of the British and American support for teaching English. A list of the British Council staff and of British teachers is provided, and British activities such as exhibitions, BBC broadcasts, and publications are mentioned. Weaknesses in English instruction in the areas of teachers, curricula, textbooks and exams are dealt with, and a bibliography of relevant studies concludes the paper. (CLK)

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ENGLISH-TEACHING INFORMATION CENTRE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFILE

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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COUNTRY: Arab Republic of Egypt

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1. Role of English

English is the main foreign language taught and used in Egypt and its usefulness internationally in politics, education and commerce is fully recognised. The authorities have become aware that to satisfy these needs adequately school and university syllabuses need revision, better textbooks are required, the quality of teachers and teaching must be improved and particular attention must be paid to the teaching of English for special purposes.

1.1 English is the medium of instruction in only a small number of fee-paying schools, 8 in Cairo and 5 in Alexandria, formerly run on British lines with British staff and still supported to some extent by various Trusts. These schools are influential because their pupils include the children of persons prominent in the Government, business and the professions. The largest numbers are found in the primary departments. English is normally the medium of instruction in some areas of higher education notably at the university stage in medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, science, veterinary science, engineering and architecture. Nurses are also taught in English at the Higher Nursing Institutes. The quality of this teaching is declining, however, and lecturers resort to an increasing amount of explanation in Arabic.

1.2 In university departments where English is not the medium of instruction, eg history, archaeology, geography and commerce, it is often used as a study language: English references are consulted and postgraduate theses will include at least an outline written in English.

1.3 English is not widely used as a medium of communication among the general public. Most Egyptians who have received a secondary school education can say a few words in English, but the English of those recently graduated tends to be of a lower standard than that of earlier generations of school leavers.

1.4 English is , however, an important language of international communication. Where tourists and foreign experts are to be found, it is commonly employed. It is widely used in trade. Cairo radio has news bulletins and commentaries in English, English language films are popular, and there is an English language newspaper.

2. English within the Educational System

State education is free at all stages and compulsory at the primary stage. English is not taught at the primary stage It is introduced as a first or second foreign language at the preparatory stage when pupils are approximately 12 years old. The preparatory course runs for three years followed by a further three years of secondary school for those who qualify. Pupils who fail to qualify for the academic general secondary

school can go to a technical secondary school where English is also taught.

2.1 There are five periods of English a week at the preparatory stage which amounts to about three hours of effective teaching. At the secondary stage there are six periods a week in the first year. In the second year (fifth year of English) classes divide into literary and scientific sections, with seven and six periods a week respectively. In the third year the literary section has seven and the scientific section five periods of English a week. Pupils who take English as a second foreign language have fewer periods. English instruction of one or two hours a week is given to first year university students in some faculties.

2.2 In the past Egyptian schools were influenced by the British literary tradition. During the 1950's and 1960's the prescribed reader - generally a simplified text of a 'great work' was the central point of the teaching programme. Detailed questions were set and the book had to be fully covered both in linguistic and literary senses. In 1970/1971 a shift of emphasis was made towards reading the prescribed book extensively for the enjoyment of the story. The examination no longer poses questions on minor details of plot or character and language matters to such an extent as formerly. The specially written textbook, 'Living English' books I to IV presents dialogues or passages for reading and study followed by language work. Thus there is less need to use the prescribed readers as the main source of language teaching material in the classroom. The position is still far from satisfactory, however. In English Departments, at the university stage the tradition is still heavily literary. Though courses called 'Linguistics' and 'Phonetics' are undertaken, generally in the first or second years of a four-year degree course, they are very superficial. The continuing literary tradition is particularly damaging in the Faculties of Education where the teachers-in-training have insufficient language competence to deal with the novels and plays prescribed. Invariably students have insufficient practice in speaking the the language and engaging in normal tutorial interchange in English. Some change of emphasis is gradually emerging as a result of the British Council's policy of making appointments under the various aid schemes to concentrate on English language teaching. Cairo University has instituted a Diploma in Applied Linguistics and Ain Shams University and Alexandria University are examining proposals for an MA in Applied Linguistics.

2.3 English is an examination subject (either as a first or second foreign language) for the Preparatory School Leaving Certificate at the age of fifteen and for the Secondary School Leaving Certificate which governs entrance to the university. In the English-medium schools an advanced English paper may be taken which may add a small number of bonus marks to the aggregate required for university entrance.

2.4 A pass in English in the Secondary Leaving Certificate is a requirement for university entrance.

2.5 At the preparatory and secondary stages the choice of syllabuses and textbooks is centrally controlled by the Ministry of Education. In the English-medium schools a wider freedom of choice is possible, but this is frustrated to some extent by state examination requirements. University departments of English prescribe texts for themselves (in the first year often ill-compiled anthologies by departmental staff) and generally supervise the teaching of English in other departments. English for these special purposes suffers badly from lack of interest on the part of teachers who have had no training and from inappropriate course books.

2.6 The Inspectorate is strongly hierarchical. There is a Dean and six Inspectors-General who may be considered roughly the equivalent of HMI's. Each of the zones into which the country is divided has a senior Inspector of English and supporting secondary and preparatory school Inspectors. The zonal Inspectors implement the policy of the Ministry of Education with regard to textbooks, radio and television programmes, preparation of syllabuses etc. The Dean of the English Inspectorate and his advisory committee of Inspectors-General determine the general shape of the teaching of English although they rely on the cooperation of the Under-Secretaries of State in achieving action and the approval to spend money. In general it may be said that the Inspectorate does not have sufficient status to be fully effective as an educational supervisory body.

2.7 There is an emphasis on the teaching of English for special purposes in the second and third years of the secondary course where materials are used to assist the scientific section in employing English for science. An attempt is made to cyclostyle suitable material for use by university students who are using English for studying engineering, medicine, etc. Most of this work tends to be gramatically unsystematic and generally pays too much attention to lists of technical vocabulary. There are plans to increase the number of secondary schools for commerce, mechanical trades, industrial skills and agriculture. A secondary technical school has been established, with considerable British help, at Moharrem Bey, Alexandria.

2.8 There are a small number of commercial schools of English in Cairo and Alexandria and evening classes are provided in some of the English-medium schools. The Division of Public Service of the American University in Cairo is the largest agency providing courses at various levels for adults who wish to learn English. Similar extra-mural work is carried out in Ain Shams University and Cairo University. There is an urgent need for more and better facilities and it is to be hoped that reputable private schools of English will be able to start operations in the near future, following the lead of International House which now has an associated school operating.

3. Teaching Cadre

The supply of teachers is very much under strength particularly in some of the rural zones. It is very difficult to make reliable estimates because of the seconding of large numbers of Egyptian teachers to other Arab states.

3.1 Nearly the whole of the English teaching staff in Government schools is Egyptian. A handful of VSO's taught for a few years in English-medium schools in Cairo and Alexandria; it is now the policy to send VSO's to Government schools in smaller towns, particularly in the areas of reconstruction along the Canal; a very few teach in Faculties of Education. In the English-medium schools a small proportion of the teachers are foreign some of them being the British wives of Egyptians.

3.2 The staffs of Government secondary schools are qualified either by having taken a university degree followed by a one-year postgraduate course for a Diploma in Education, or by possessing a degree in an academic subject plus educational subjects from a Faculty of Education.

Many of the teachers of English at the preparatory stage are not qualified to teach the subject because they have graduated in such subjects as history, philosophy, geography or librarianship. Most of the teachers required to teach English to the scientific sections in the secondary schools are unfamiliar with scientific or technical English.

3.3 Most teachers for the preparatory and secondary stages are trained in what were formerly called Higher Teachers' Colleges. These have now been absorbed into the Universities of Alexandria, Ain Shams, Assiut, Mansoura and Tanta as Faculties of Education. Because of the large numbers involved, courses tend to be taught in isolated components: language, literature, methodology, psychology, philosophy. Teaching practice takes place in the third and fourth year, but this is not supervised by the lecturers who gave the methodology courses. Many graduates in English from Faculties of Arts become teachers in secondary schools. They are able to obtain a teaching qualification by part time attendance at a Faculty of Education. The American University in Cairo offers a Diploma and an MA in the teaching of English as a foreign language but these qualifications still await official recognition. A team from UCLA is at present investigating the possibility of setting up postgraduate courses at the Faculty of Education of Ain Shams University. An intensive in-service training programme is required at all levels. Courses run by the In-Service Training Centre; in Cairo and Alexandria at present reach only a minority of teachers.

3.4 A conference of senior inspectors and inspectors of English is held annually. There are "technical boards" in some zones to prepare material and discuss problems but they meet infrequently. An Association for the Teaching of English in the Middle East and North Africa (ATEMNA) was established in Beirut in 1971 but its influence in Egypt so far is minimal.

4. Teaching Materials

At the preparatory and secondary stages the Ministry of Education prescribes a course book, "Living English", specially written by Egyptian linguists trained in structural linguistics in America some years ago. This is widely recognised to be inadequate and various proposals to replace it are being considered. Other books, including supplementary readers, are prescribed from time to time to extend the scope of the course.

4.1 Since "Living English" is produced locally there are usually adequate stocks available. There seems to be little difficulty, apart from delays in delivery, in obtaining the other books which are mostly supplied by Longman. At the university level, there is a serious shortage of texts and critical works. British Council and ODM book presentations have gone some way to improve the situation. It is hoped that the recent introduction of the low-priced book scheme will be of great benefit. Apart from TV sets and locally produced books there is a general shortage of ELT material in schools.

4.2 The general pattern is towards uniformity in textbooks. In view of the inadequacy of the course book prescribed there are proposals to try out other books available on the market which might be suitable for the Egyptian situation. As a long-term solution there is the possibility that the Ministry of Education may support the preparation of a specially produced course book. Several publishing firms have expressed an interest in helping such a scheme.

4.3 The locally produced "Living English" is prescribed for all schools.

4.4 Tapes and films are little used except in the In-Service Training Centre.

4.5 The Ministry of Education has a Centre for audio-visual materials but it is seldom used. Broadcasting studios are being added to this Centre.

5. English outside the Educational System

There is an enormous demand for English classes for the general public and large numbers of students attend classes offered by the Public Service Departments of universities. A few of the English-medium schools offer evening classes in English. At present there are but a handful of small commercially run schools. Interest has been shown by recognised language schools in Britain and a school associated with International House opened in March 1975. It is hoped that the current interest in English for special purposes will be reflected in the curriculum.

6. British Support for the Teaching of English

6.1

6.1.1 British Council staff is as follows:

English Language Officer, Cairo

Educational Broadcasting Officer (English Language), Cairo.

The Assistant Representative based in Alexandria has certain ELT duties and teaches at Alexandria University.

6.1.2 Contract ELT staff recruited by the British Council are as follows:

Cairo University: 2 posts

Ain Shams University: 2 posts

Alexandria University: 3 posts

In-Service Training Centre, Cairo: 3 posts (one eventually to go to Assiut)

In-Service Training Centre, Alexandria: 1 post

Secondary Technical School, Moharrem Bey, Alexandria: 3 posts

English-medium Schools: 4 posts

Four additional posts (in Ain Shams University and the Ministry of Education) are projected for 1976.

6.1.3 There are 14 VSOs teaching English in Government secondary schools, and 4 in universities.

6.1.4 A number of British women married to Egyptians teach in the American University and the English-medium Schools.

6.2 The key posts are the Advisers to the two In-Service Training Centres, the university lecturers concerned with teaching English to future teachers of English (in the Faculties of Education of Ain Shams and Alexandria Universities and in the English departments of Cairo University and the Women's College), and the more recently appointed lecturers in ESP at Alexandria University.

6.3 The main ELT activities of British Contract staff are in direct teaching in teacher-training institutions, advisory work, participation in courses and materials production (especially for radio and TV).

6.4 There are fairly regular exhibitions of ELT books and supplementary readers held at the British Council centre and circulated round Faculties of Education. ELT courses for secondary school teachers based on the In-Service Training Centres, for which the British Council recruits visiting lecturers, take place twice a year. Educational seminars usually take place annually for the English-medium Schools. The Universities of Cairo and Alexandria have recently instituted in-service methodology courses for university lecturers which include an English Language component.

6.5 Although the main course book prescribed for schools is a local production most other books used at all levels are British. Supporting taped material is being increasingly used. BBC series are broadcast. The two "View and Teach" series of films are available.

6.6 The English Language Centre of the British Council is in its second year of operation. It caters particularly for candidates officially sponsored for TA awards whose English needs improving before they go to Britain. There are also classes for officials who need English in their daily work.

7. American Support for the Teaching of English

The main American activity is centred in the American University in Cairo particularly in its English Language Teaching Institute. For three years the main point of Anglo-American co-operation has been in the Summer School of Linguistics held at Cairo University for which the British Council recruits faculty members and provides a specialist library. Close links are preserved with the Ford Foundation which, however, has tended to concentrate recently on sociolinguistic matters.

8. General Statement

The following are the main weaknesses of the present situation:

8.1 Teachers. The number who were taught by British teachers and retain a near mother-tongue fluency is dwindling. There is always a large number of the better teachers on loan to other Arab countries. Training courses devote too little time to language learning and the methodology of language teaching. The supply of adequately trained teachers has not kept pace with the expansion of the education system.

8.2 Curricula. Considerable revision is required in schools and universities. Much more emphasis needs to be placed on language and on English for special purposes.

8.3 Textbooks. Complete revision (or replacement) is essential in schools; better selection is necessary in universities.

8.4 Examinations. Traditional essay-type questions involving an enormous amount of labour in marking and in precise assessments prevail. An overhaul of the system is long overdue.

Efforts to remedy these defects have been made. Advice on all relevant matters is readily available to the Egyptian authorities (It should be mentioned that many Egyptian officials are well aware of what is wrong; in some cases the remedies are known. But there are often formidable sectional or bureaucratic obstacles). The British Council in its own work and as the agent of ODM has concentrated its efforts on pre- and in-service training of teachers and on ESP. British publishers are willing to supply books and help in devising tailor-made courses. There are signs that a renewed American effort in certain areas may be added to our own. But there is no easy solution and more money and manpower are needed. The need for continued and increased support is undeniable.

9. Current Research and Bibliography

Dr Faze Larudee: TEFL in the Middle East - A Preliminary Survey, 1970 (The American University in Cairo).

P.S. Mckay and M.F. Roddis: Report on School Television 1970-71.

A Review of Programs with Guidelines for Future Development, 1973 (Institute of Languages and Translation - Al Azhar University).

Bjornn H. Jernudd and Garry L. Garrison: Language Treatment in Egypt 1974 (Ford Foundation).

Language and Development: A Retrospective Survey of Ford Foundation Projects, 1975.

With the establishment of an ESP unit in Alexandria University a start has been made on the investigation of the needs of students in medicine. A joint project of the American University and Cairo University has investigated the teaching situation in the engineering faculties of both universities and produced some sample material.